



Guiding Your Child's Early Learning

A Parent's Guide to the Vermont Early Learning Standards



VERMONT'S VISION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Every family in Vermont has the right to comprehensive, high quality child development services for its young children. Every Vermont community shall nurture the healthy development of young children and strengthen families. To support communities, the state of Vermont will create a unified system of child development services which shares common standards for quality and respects the diversity and uniqueness of individuals and programs.

(EARLY CHILDHOOD WORK GROUP, 1992)

Guiding Your Child's Early Learning: A Parent's Guide to the Vermont Early Learning Standards is the third in a series of publications on Vermont's Early Learning Standards. It is designed to be a companion to *The Vermont Early Learning Standards: Guiding the Development and Learning of Children Entering Kindergarten* (2004); and *The Instructor's Guide to the Vermont Early Learning Standards* (2005). This document was published with support from the Vermont Head Start State Collaboration Office, in collaboration with the Vermont Department of Education.

The Vermont Early Learning Standards can be found at www.state.vt.us/educ/new/pdfdoc/pgm_earlyed/vels_03.pdf. The Instructor's Guide to the Vermont Early Learning Standards can be found at http://www.state.vt.us/educ/new/html/pgm_earlyed/pubs/vels_instructors_guide_05.html.

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For young children, learning is fun and rewarding. It happens naturally as they begin to explore and understand the world around them. When children learn, they satisfy their natural curiosity and develop confidence. This sense of confidence and understanding helps them throughout their lives. By the same token, when parents help their child learn, they also develop greater confidence in themselves as their child's first and most important teachers.

This guide was developed for families who want to strengthen their understanding of how everyday activities promote early learning in young children while preparing them to begin school as confident and eager learners. It is also meant as a reminder to families that learning is fun.

Is My Child Ready For School?

This is an important question many parents ask themselves about their preschooler. Some parents think school readiness means possessing academic skills, such as knowing letters, numbers, colors and shapes. Others view it as having social skills — like listening to the teacher, following directions and getting along with others. Being ready for school is all this and much more.

Whatever readiness means to you, we believe it includes children developing the knowledge, skills, behaviors and attitudes they will need to successfully participate in, and benefit from, kindergarten activities.

Fortunately, this can be accomplished through the everyday activities and routines of family life. You shouldn't feel pressured to "teach" your child to get him or her ready for school. In fact, you're probably already doing a great job in this respect! This guide will help you feel better about what you do and also give you some new ideas.

What Are The Vermont Early Learning Standards?

The Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) were developed to help parents, teachers and others share reasonable expectations for what preschoolers are capable of knowing and doing. VELS provides consistent, appropriate information about what many children are capable of as they enter kindergarten.

Used by Head Start, public schools, child care programs and others, VELS focuses on eight areas of development and learning:★

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language, Literacy and Communication
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies
- Creative Expression
- Physical Development and Health

★ *The learning goals for each of these areas can be found in the back of this guide. The complete version of VELS can be viewed by going to: http://www.state.vt.us/educ/new/pdfdoc/pgm_earlyed/vels_03.pdf*

Your Child and the VELS

VELS can help you and your child's early educators provide opportunities that will help make kindergarten a great learning experience. Based on research, reality, and common sense, VELS provides a menu of skills, knowledge and behaviors that many five-year-old children are capable of knowing or doing. VELS is not a checklist of everything your child must know or do before going to kindergarten. Likewise, it is not a test for determining your child's readiness for kindergarten.



Consider Your Child's Uniqueness

Before looking at the standards and how they may apply to your child, take a few moments to think about your child's unique characteristics and situation.

- What are your child's strengths?
- What fascinates your child?
- What is your child trying to do better?
- What are some of the challenges you see your child experiencing?
- What are your hopes and dreams for your child?
- Which significant people in your family, neighborhood and community have shaped your child's life so far?

Once you've thought about your child's abilities, interests and needs, you can use VELS as a "road map" for helping her continued development and learning. Also, if your child is enrolled in an early childhood program, you can use VELS as a common language when you talk with your child's teachers. Teachers throughout Vermont are using VELS in their preschool classrooms and child care programs.

We all believe the learning that happens before kindergarten is important and provides a solid foundation for life. However, children aren't expected to have all the skills, behaviors and knowledge of the VELS before entering kindergarten.

Young children develop at their own pace so don't be distressed if your child doesn't display all these characteristics by the time kindergarten begins. Kindergarten is where your child will learn many of these and other essential things. Please note also that some children with unique challenges will develop according to their own timelines, and with extra support.

As a parent, one of the most important things you can do is to help your child look forward

to going to kindergarten with enthusiasm, curiosity, excitement and confidence. The more you are involved with your child and your child's school, the more successful your child's learning experience will be.



A Word About Children's Play

Some people think children's play is a waste of time. Nothing could be farther from the truth! When children play, they develop important skills, knowledge and behaviors that support their learning, now and for the rest of their lives.

For example, it's through play that children:

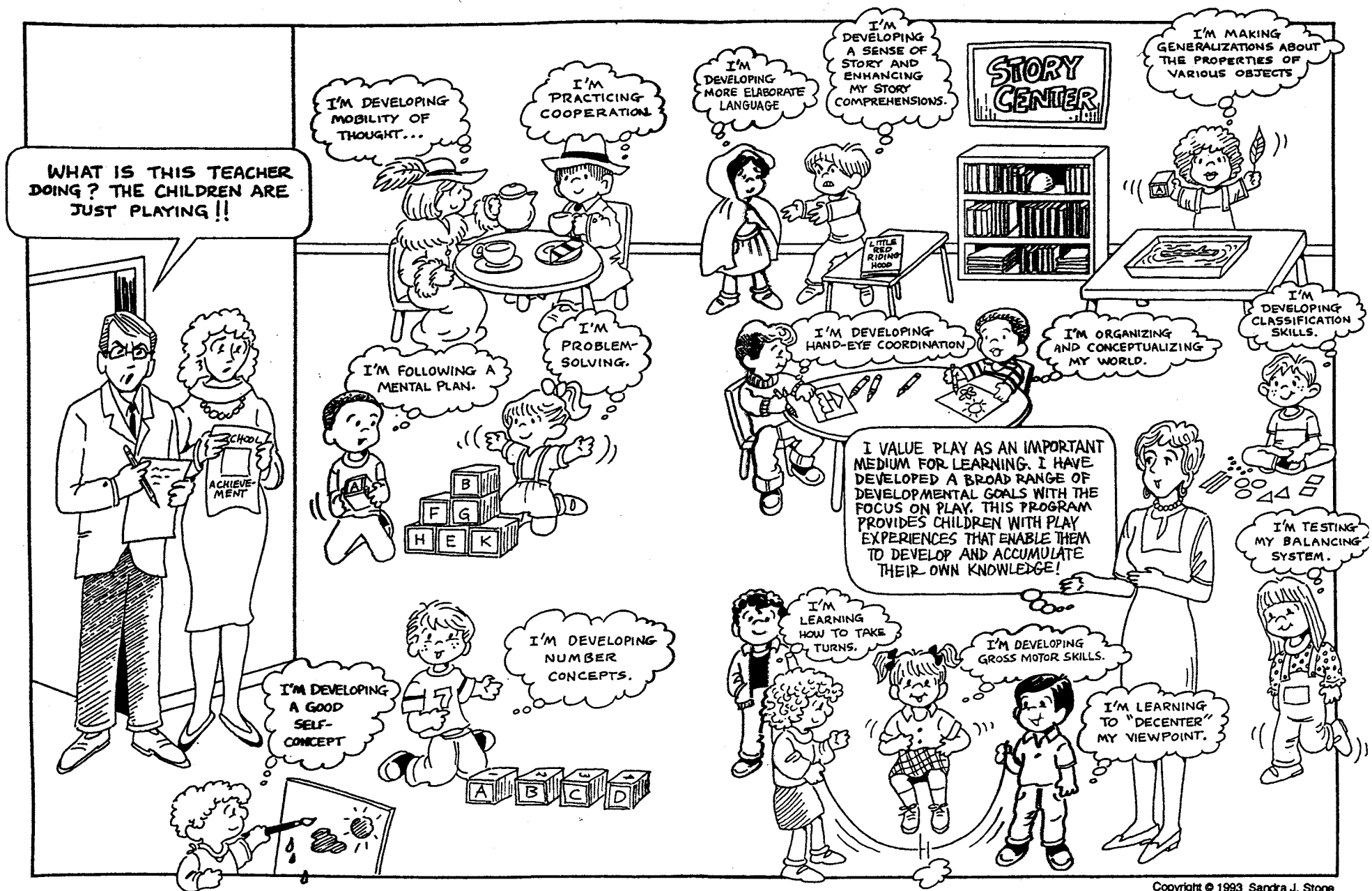
- Understand how things work
- Connect what they already know to new situations
- Improve on previously acquired skills
- Cooperate with others
- Make choices
- Make predictions
- Solve problems
- Persist in the face of challenge and
- Develop confidence.

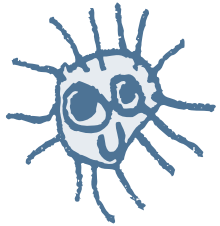
VELS recognize play as an important part of learning. When children play, they challenge themselves to do and learn more. As a parent, you can help your child to learn through play, and by involving them in family activities. Remember, learning *is* fun!

How Can I Help My Child With the Vermont Early Learning Standards?

There is no one right way to help your child achieve the learning goals of the VELS. In fact, *everything* families do together — including talking about what they do — sets the stage for their child's development and learning.

Many everyday activities contribute significantly to your child's readiness for school. In the following pages you will find examples of how everyday family activities support your child's learning and address many of the goals of the VELS.





APPROACHES TO LEARNING

As an infant, your child came into this world with his own unique way of learning that leads to success in school. You might say he was “wired to learn.” One child may be well-organized and bursting with initiative, while another requires more structure and encouragement. Some children dive right in with a new experience; others observe quietly as they learn new information.

All children, regardless of their unique abilities and characteristics, are able to learn and be successful. The ways in which they approach new learning opportunities, however, will be as varied as the individuals themselves.

It is important for children to develop a sense of wonder; a willingness to participate and share their ideas; the quality of persistence; and the ability to draw on past experiences to inform new situations. Parents and other adults must ensure that every child has the opportunity to make choices and be actively involved in his or her own learning. In this process, your child will develop initiative, curiosity, confidence and many other positive habits of lifelong learning.

Children's books that address approaches to learning:

- *The Carrot Seed* by Ruth Kraus
- *Little One Step* by Simon James
- *We Were Tired of Living in A House* by Liesel Moak Skorpen
- *Mirette on the Highwire* by Emily Arnold McCully
- *The Big Brown Box* by Marisabina Russo

What you can do

- Encourage your child to try new experiences.
- Respond to your child's questions, ideas, interests and concerns.
- Be eager yourself as you approach new learning situations.
- Learn something, or try something new, together with your child.
- Be sensitive to your child's need to approach new situations slowly, and with caution.
- Praise your child's attempts, not just his successes.
- Offer your child a variety of choices, all of which are acceptable to you.
- Give your child unconditional love and acceptance.

A Family Activity: Making Playdough

Making and playing with playdough is one of the best tried-and-true activities you can do with your child. Follow this simple recipe to make cooked playdough:

2 cups flour
1 cup salt
2 tsp. cream of tartar
2 Tbsp. cooking oil
2 cups water
Food coloring

Stir and cook all ingredients over medium heat until they form a lump. Cool slightly; the mass will be too hot to handle at first. Knead until smooth. Store in an airtight container or plastic bag.

How does using playdough help develop a child's approach to learning?

Playing with playdough is an “open-ended” activity — there is no right or wrong way to do it, no steps that must be done in order, and no winners or losers. How a child uses the playdough gives parents and other adults a view of how your child approaches learning.

Your child may dig right in, or need a little encouragement. Your child may be curious about the cooking process and barely be able to wait for the playdough to cool off. Or, he may seem less interested in cooking it and more curious about how it will smell and feel once it's done.

Initiative, persistence, curiosity, reasoning and self-organization contribute to a child's developing approach to learning. Playing with playdough together gives you a chance to observe your child's approach to learning — *and* your own. This is also fun for children of all ages, which makes it an activity families can enjoy together.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Social development refers to how your child interacts with others. **Emotional development** refers to your child's awareness of herself as a valued and valuable individual.

The roots of relationships take hold during your child's first days of life, and develop rapidly through the preschool years. A great deal of your child's learning occurs through play and interactions with family members, other children and adults. Children who develop and maintain strong, positive relationships tend to be active, successful learners. These relationships influence how your child feels about herself; this affects how she approaches new and challenging tasks, along with her attitude toward school and lifelong learning.

When your child feels good about herself, she is more likely to treat others with care and respect.

What you can do

- Follow your child's lead in play. Let your child direct you, and follow her plan in the play scenario she creates.
- Accept your child's feelings.
- Help your child identify her feelings with words, facial expressions and gestures.
- Play simple games with your child like Simon Says, I Spy, and Duck, Duck, Goose.
- Be consistent about rules and expectations for your child's behavior.
- Accept your child's need to be alone sometimes.
- Offer to have your child's friend over for a play date.
- If you have pets, encourage your child to care for a pet by feeding, walking or cleaning up after it.
- Grow and care for house or garden plants with your child.

A Family Activity: Making a Family Album

Special moments and events that are captured in photographs contribute to your family's unique history. Make a family album together using photos of each member of the family and special friends, pets and others who are important to you.

This is an activity that also promotes language and communication because there is usually a story connected to each photograph... "Remember when we went to the lake?"... "This was the first time you ate ice cream — you loved it so much!"... "This is you getting mad at Bobby for taking your bear"... "This is you right after you were born — we were so happy to see you!"

Family albums can be very simple or quite elaborate. The simple ones are inexpensive, and easy to make. Children may want to look at their albums alone with you, or take them to school or a friend's house if needed to ease separation. Make sure to include pictures of important people and of your child when she was much younger. This acknowledges your child's special relationships, as well as lets her appreciate how much she's grown.

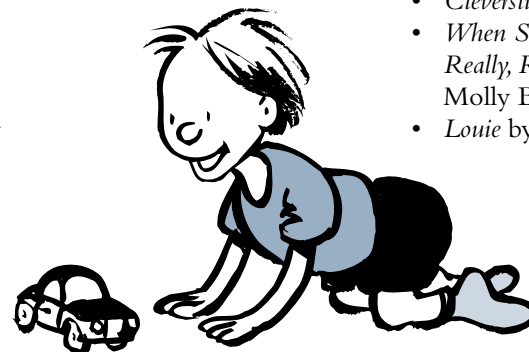
An easy alternative to a family album is to make a Treasure Box of Family Memories by decorating a shoebox and storing your favorite family pictures inside.

How does a family album help promote social and emotional development?

In their family album, children will see pictures of themselves at play and in the relationships they hold dear. Pictures of themselves at various stages of their lives help them develop a self-concept, especially when they acknowledge how much they've grown and how dependent they once were. Through conversations as you look at the album together, these pictures will highlight the importance of interactions and relationships with others, including adult friends and special people. A family album is the beginning of creating a sense of community by showing who we belong to and who we care about.

Children's books that address social and emotional development:

- *Koala Lou* by Mem Fox
- *Tacky the Penguin* by Helen Lester
- *A Color of His Own* by Leo Lionni
- *Cleversticks* by Bernard Ashley
- *When Sophie Gets Angry, Really, Really Angry* by Molly Bang
- *Louie* by Ezra Jack Keats.



LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND COMMUNICATION

Your child has been developing language from birth. Crying, cooing and those first words were his early communications with you and others. In the years between three and five, children become quite capable as communicators. Language development is the foundation for building the skills of reading and writing, which we also call literacy.

It is important that young children have many opportunities to learn language and practice communication skills. These will help them develop relationships, obtain information and express themselves in a variety of settings.

Your child builds language and communication skills by being involved in meaningful experiences that require him to express his ideas and feelings, listen and understand sounds and language, and learn new words.

A Family Activity: Simon Says

You probably know the game “Simon Says.” It goes like this: Tell your child to follow the directions that include the words, “Simon says,” but not to follow the directions that don’t. Give your child a series of directions on moving his body, beginning with the words “Simon says.” Then throw in a direction that leaves out that phrase, and see if he notices the difference.

For example, “*Simon says touch your head. Simon says turn around. Simon says touch the ground. Simon says jump in place. Simon says stop jumping. Sit down.*” (That really means don’t sit down, because Simon didn’t say to!) The older the child, the more complex the directions could be. At that stage, try two-step directions like “rub your tummy and blink your eyes.”

While your child will most likely learn to read and write in school, you can help him take advantage of the materials, activities and interactions in the classroom that nurture literacy. Children learn to read and write the same way they learn language — slowly, over time, and with many opportunities to practice using words, letters, books and stories, and of course, play.

What you can do

- Talk with your child a lot. Explain things, teach him new words, have conversations, ask open-ended questions (questions without a one-word answer), talk about feelings, describe what you are doing.
- Point out signs and print in the environment. Notice common signs like “Exit,” “Stop,” “In,” “Closed,” “Open,” and so on. Identify the letters in the words.
- Help your child identify favorite food items in the grocery store, and then see if he can find that item by “reading” the label.
- Teach your child the letters in his name, and then teach your child to write his name. (Don’t worry if your child writes backwards or upside down before he gets it right — that will come later.)
- Play simple rhyming games like “I’m thinking of a word that rhymes with bark. That’s right, park. We’re going to the park.”
- Have a supply of pens, markers and crayons, and paper available and encourage your child to play, scribble, draw, and color with writing materials.
- Read with your child every day. Early exposure to books and stories builds knowledge about books and a lifelong love of reading.
- Eat together as a family and have dinner conversations. Research shows that family conversations around the dinner table build vocabulary, listening and speaking skills that contribute to your child becoming a successful reader.

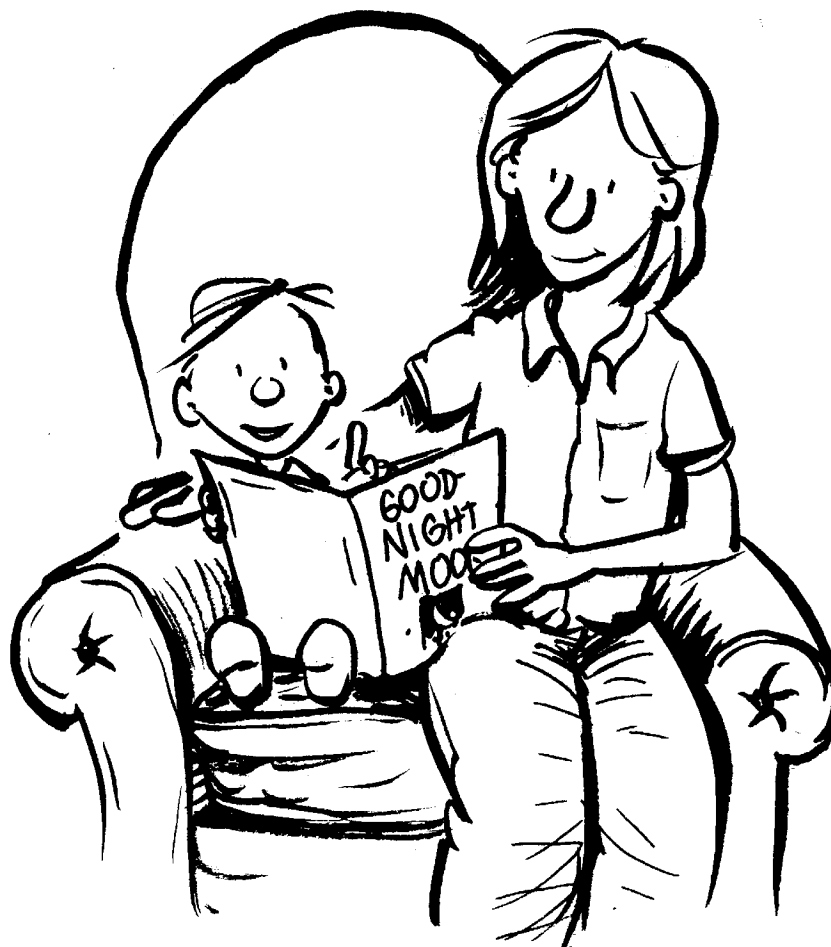
How does this help promote language, literacy and communication?

Simon Says is a listening game, and listening is one of the major learning goals for building language, literacy, and communication. Listening is one of the ways your child learns to understand language and build his vocabulary. It's also very important to social development. Children who are good listeners get along better with others; and this is especially true at school.

Listening is an important component of conversations, too. Having a conversation involves taking turns listening and speaking. Since conversations build vocabulary, introduce new ideas and contribute to good relationships, you will reinforce your child's listening, learning and communication skills simply by engaging him in a conversation.

Children's books that address language, literacy and communication:

- *Poems for the Very Young* by Michael Rosen
- *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin
- *Alphabet Room* by Sarah Pinto
- *Bunny Cakes* by Rosemary Wells
- *Sheep in a Jeep* by Nancy Shaw

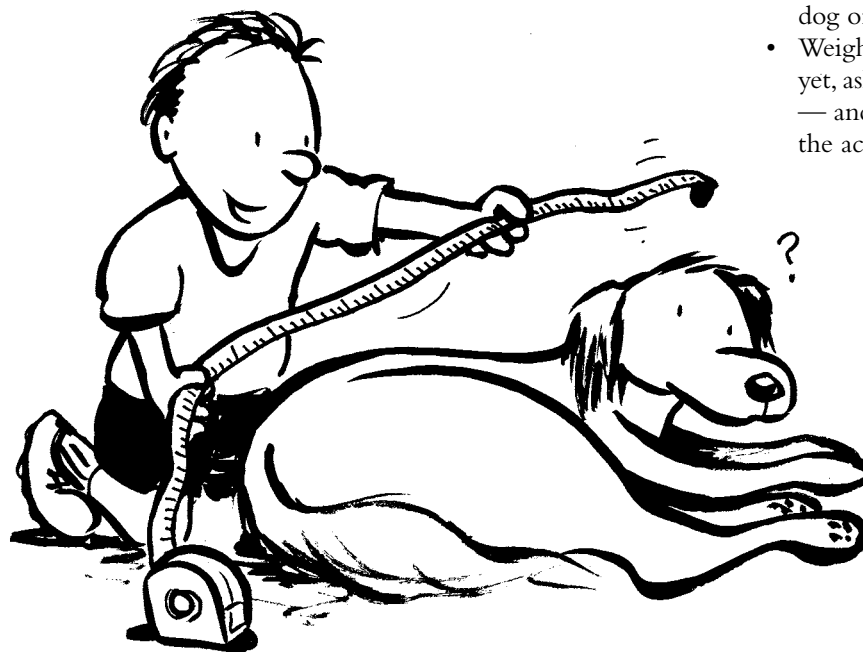


MATHEMATICS

Did you know that your child uses mathematics in her play all the time? When she complains to you that Joey had more time on the swings than she did, she is estimating and making a comparison — two very important math skills.

Children are inclined to notice similarities and differences in objects, group their toys and materials together, organize information, and sort objects into categories. Math helps children think logically, solve problems and make connections in the world around them.

When your child plays in the sandbox, cooks applesauce with you, completes a puzzle or collects all the socks from the laundry basket, she is developing the mathematical thinking skills that will be useful when learning about math in school. When she learns the words for her mathematical thinking, she is developing a math vocabulary that helps her talk about mathematics.



Math for young children isn't something you have to teach in a structured way. Rather, build on your child's natural experiences with people, places and things by encouraging her curiosity, making observations together and talking about what you notice.

What you can do

- Group your child's toys together when you clean up. All the books go in one place, the cars and trucks in another.
- Use numbers when you talk to your child. "We'll have three potatoes for dinner," or "Why don't you wear the jacket with five buttons?"
- Go on a shape hunt. Look for all the different shapes naturally occurring in the environment, like the neighborhood playground, the laundromat or her bedroom.
- Talk about the shapes on her dinner plate.
- Keep track of your child's growth with a height chart or a series of pencil marks on a wall. Talk about taller and shorter, measure how tall he is and mark the number of inches on the wall. Compare her height with a friend or sibling.
- Use a ruler or yardstick to measure things — toys, the rug, your dog or cat.
- Weigh a bunch of bananas on a scale at the grocery store. Better yet, ask your child to guess how much they weigh (estimating) — and then actually weigh them. Compare her estimate with the actual weight.

A Family Activity: Doing Laundry

Think of all the actions involved in doing laundry. You put clothes into a basket, then transfer them into a washer or dryer. You sort, match, fold and then put them away where they belong. There is a predictable sequence to the process of doing laundry. Make sure to emphasize the sequence you use. What comes first, next and last?

Measure how much laundry detergent to put in. Compare different piles of laundry and see if your child can estimate which one is bigger. Which has more clothes? Why does this pile look bigger when that pile has more clothes in it? Sort the laundry by color. Then see if there are other ways to sort it: Put all the towels together, all Mommy's clothes together, all the pajamas together. Believe it or not, children don't think of laundry as a chore — well, not a tiresome one anyway!

Involve children in doing simple chores when they are young and they will reap the benefits by learning about math, developing language and increasing their physical skills, both gross- and fine-motor. They will also develop an understanding that their help is needed and appreciated, that they are capable of doing “real work,” and that they can make important contributions to the family or classroom community.

How does this help promote mathematical thinking?

Sorting, matching, doing things in a particular order (sequencing), and making comparisons are all skills that mathematicians use. Your child uses these skills too, in everyday play and in simple family activities.

You may have heard people say that math is all around us, and it certainly is true for children. This is one example of how a family activity or chore is a greater learning opportunity than sitting down to try to “teach” your child to count or put numbers together. Early mathematical thinking is best learned through play and everyday experiences, not through adult-directed instruction.

Children's books that promote mathematical thinking:

- *Each Orange Had Eight Slices* by Paul Giganti
- *The Doorbell Rang* by Pat Hutchins
- *Round is a Mooncake* by Roseanne Thong
- *Caps for Sale* by Esphyr Slobodkina
- *Who Sank the Boat?* by Pamela Allen
- *10 Minutes till Bedtime* by Peggy Rathman

SCIENCE

Children are fascinated by the natural world and physical events. They insist that parents and other adults answer their questions about the world around them. By encouraging this sense of wonder, parents help children to become scientific thinkers.

Your child is a natural investigator. As he tries to make sense of the world, he develops predictions and theories, just as scientists do. For a young child, science is much more than learning facts and skills. It's about making observations and putting ideas together ... It's about wondering, forming questions, and then experimenting to see what happens ... Then it's about drawing conclusions about the world based on observations, ideas and experiments.

Your child is likely to ask many questions about how the world works — how insects fly, how to make a shadow, what happens if two paints are mixed together, and much more. You can do more than provide your child with answers. You can use these opportunities to offer him resources, tools and attitudes to “do what scientists do” — pose questions, observe, experiment, record, explain, predict and conclude.



What you can do

- Ask questions aloud, such as: “I wonder what will happen if?” or “What do you think will work best here?”
- Describe the changes taking place around you and your child — in your home, in your yard, in the woods and in weather.
- Wait before answering your child's questions. Allow your child to discover things for himself, then ask him to explain his thinking.
- Encourage your child to make a prediction, then compare that with what really happened.
- Pay attention to your child's interests, and provide opportunities for him to investigate and think deeply about what fascinates him, whether it's dinosaurs, bubbles or insects.
- Take a walk in the woods and look under a fallen log. Talk together about what you see.
- Help your child to take care of plants and animals in your home. While you remain the responsible adult, your child can be involved in the care, feeding and observation of living things.
- Write things down. Help your child keep a notebook of his special discoveries, experiments and observations. Recording these things is just what scientists do!

How does making pancakes promote scientific thinking?

Making food together is a learning opportunity that involves science knowledge and scientific thinking. Children use their senses, along with tools like measuring spoons, egg beaters and spatulas, to make observations, gather and record information, and predict what might happen.

You can ask your child to guess what will happen when he mixes the wet and dry ingredients together. Talk about what you both observe when you pour the batter onto the griddle. See if she can describe the taste and smell of pancake batter. Compare that to the cooked pancakes. What happens if you leave out the eggs? What would happen if you left out the milk? What happens if you add blueberries? Or bananas? How would you make a square pancake? Why did gooeey liquid turn to a solid?

A Family Activity: Making Pancakes

It's Saturday morning. Everyone's a little more relaxed, and many families enjoy preparing breakfast together. Children love to get in the kitchen with parents and do real work — so by all means, let them help set the table, wash the dishes and participate in cooking!

Pancake recipe

Nonstick spray
1 1/3 c. flour
1 egg
1 c. buttermilk
1/4 c. granulated sugar
1 heaping tsp. baking powder
1 tsp baking soda
1/4 c. cooking oil

Preheat griddle or frying pan over medium heat. Use a pan with a nonstick surface or use spray. Mix all of the remaining ingredients together by hand (or use a blender or mixer) until smooth. Pour batter by spoonfuls into hot pan, forming 5-inch circles. When bubbles form and the edges appear to harden slightly, flip the pancakes. They should be light brown. Cook the other side the same amount of time.

Makes 8-10 pancakes.

Children's books that promote science and scientific thinking:

- *What Do You Do With A Tail Like This?* by Steve Jenkins
- *Bear Shadow* by Frank Asch
- *Actual Size* by Steve Jenkins
- *One Little Seed* by Elaine Greenstein
- *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen



SOCIAL STUDIES

Human beings are social creatures. We live together in families, neighborhoods and communities. We develop customs and traditions that reflect who we are and what we value. Social studies build upon your child's social development by encouraging her to explore her relationship to her community, the environment and the world around her. Social studies also examine how your child lives together with other children and adults as a group, and how that group is influenced by the land, our work and our time in history.

What you can do

- Explore your community. Go on a variety of different outings. For recreation, visit parks or local playgrounds. To get to know what people do for work, visit the post office, fire station or a farm. To feel connected to others, explore parent-child play groups, libraries, newspapers or your faith community.
- Use a map to plan your route. Explain how maps help us locate places, and direct us where we want to go.
- Talk about how members of your family rely on one another.
- Make family rules together, and explain the reasons for the rules.
- Develop a list of chores, giving each member of the family age-appropriate tasks. Explain the importance of work to your family's well-being.
- Be a role model for peacefully resolving conflicts. Teach your child to be a problem-solver who uses words, not fists.
- Talk to your child about her heritage, extended family, and family customs and traditions.
- Read books about people living in different places and times.
- Help your child to notice and appreciate similarities and differences among people.

A Family Activity: Going to the Store

In Vermont, going to the store can mean a trip to the general store, the supermarket, a co-op, a convenience store or a department store. While shopping with children may have some challenges, it is also an experience filled with social studies learning opportunities!

Under the right conditions — with children well-rested and fed — a brief outing to the store offers possibilities to learn about geography, the difference between the present and the past, and people: how they live, and their relationship and responsibility to the environment.

Tips for making shopping a pleasant and safe experience for you and your child:

- Keep shopping outings brief. Don't overdo it by trying to get all your shopping done at once.
- If possible, avoid going to the store when your child (or you) are tired, need a nap or feel under the weather.
- Position your child in a shopping cart, so that you can make eye contact with each other.
- Describe what you see. Talk about what you are doing, how you will use the things you buy, and where they came from — a farm or a factory, nearby or across the world?
- Never leave your child alone in the car while you run into the store, even for just a minute!

How does going to the store help promote social studies?

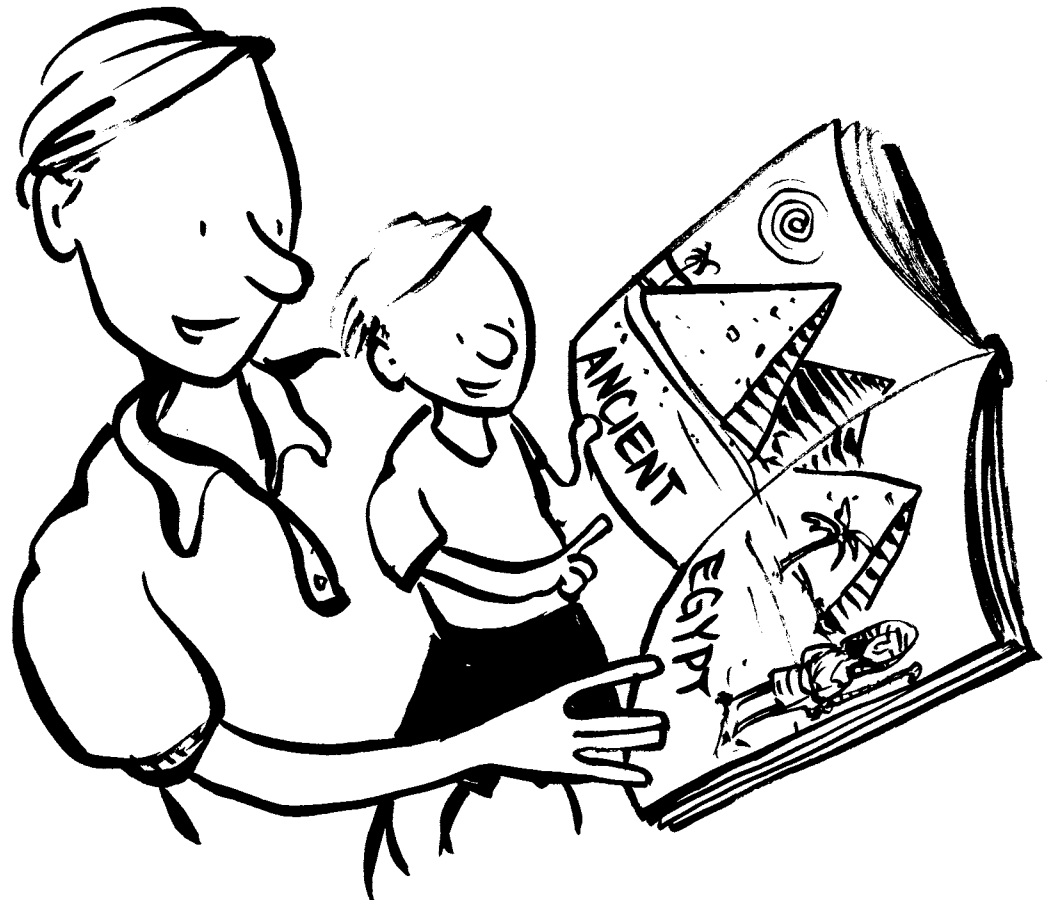
A big part of understanding social studies is understanding people and how they live. Children begin to understand, communicate, share, cooperate and participate with others in a community, by going to the store with you.

You can talk to your child about how and why money is used to purchase the things we need. Or, talk about all the jobs people do in the store, and the types of jobs in your community. To live together and enjoy each other, we make rules and laws; talk about the rules we follow in the store and elsewhere.

Another important part of social studies is understanding the physical environment. Some of the items your child sees in stores are grown or produced right here in Vermont, but many others are made in other parts of the world. Talk about where things are made or grown, how they got to the store, and what natural and man-made resources were used to produce the items we purchase.

Children's books that promote social studies:

- *Are We There Yet, Daddy?* by Virginia Walters
- *On the Go* by Ann Morris
- *The Big Trip* by Valerie Gorbachev
- *On Mother's Lap* by Ann H. Scott
- *Families* by Ann Morris
- *Hush! A Thai Lullaby* by Minfong Ho



CREATIVE EXPRESSION

This section might be better named “The Arts and More” — because while the arts may be the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the words “creative expression,” there is a lot more to creativity than making pretty pictures.

Your child has a natural desire to express herself and to create. Expression can come in the form of words, or it can come through the arts — painting, drawing, dancing, making music, sculpting and dramatic play. It can also come in the form of ideas, such as looking at a problem in a new way to find a brilliant solution, mediating conflicts with peers, making choices and showing leadership.

Through language, the arts and ideas, your child is able to be creative without worrying about what other people will think — an anxiety that often inhibits adults and diminishes our creative urges. As Pablo Picasso once said, “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist when he grows up.”

What you can do

- Have a positive attitude about your own creativity. Even if you don't think of yourself as artistic, share your love of the arts, or create something together with your child.
- Give your child the gift of time. Creativity shouldn't be rushed, so try to allow him to finish his projects at his own speed.
- Have a variety of creative materials on hand. Playdough, markers, glue and paper are simple and easy to find or make, and your child can use these items independently.
- Acknowledge your child's creative efforts. Remember that creativity isn't about making something that looks conventionally beautiful. Your child is more interested in the process of being creative — and that is what you should encourage. Too much emphasis on the product can make your child feel like he can't measure up to adult expectations.
- Display your and your child's artwork to show you value what he created or what you created together.

- Expose your child to music. You don't need an extensive CD collection; just turn on the radio and you'll find many types of music to enjoy.
- Incorporate movement with music. Dance, march or rock your child to sleep, with a volume and rhythm that matches the activity.
- Collect clothes, hats and shoes for dress-up play and keep them in a special place.
- Admire artwork at museums, libraries and in books. Fine art isn't just for adults!

A Family Activity: Turn on the Radio and Dance!

You can find almost any kind of music on the radio: classical, country, rock and roll ... you name it. Maybe you remember when your child first stood upright; he liked to bounce up and down to the rhythm of the music. As a preschooler, he may move his body in a much more sophisticated way. He can twirl, jump and move from side to side or up and down.

We can all move our bodies to music, whether we're standing or sitting. Make big movements. Make small movements. Move fast or slow. Move like animals or machines. Move like a soccer player or move like a ballet dancer. Wear your regular clothes or dress up to dance. Dancing to music is good exercise for your child, and for you, too. Don't forget to laugh at yourselves!

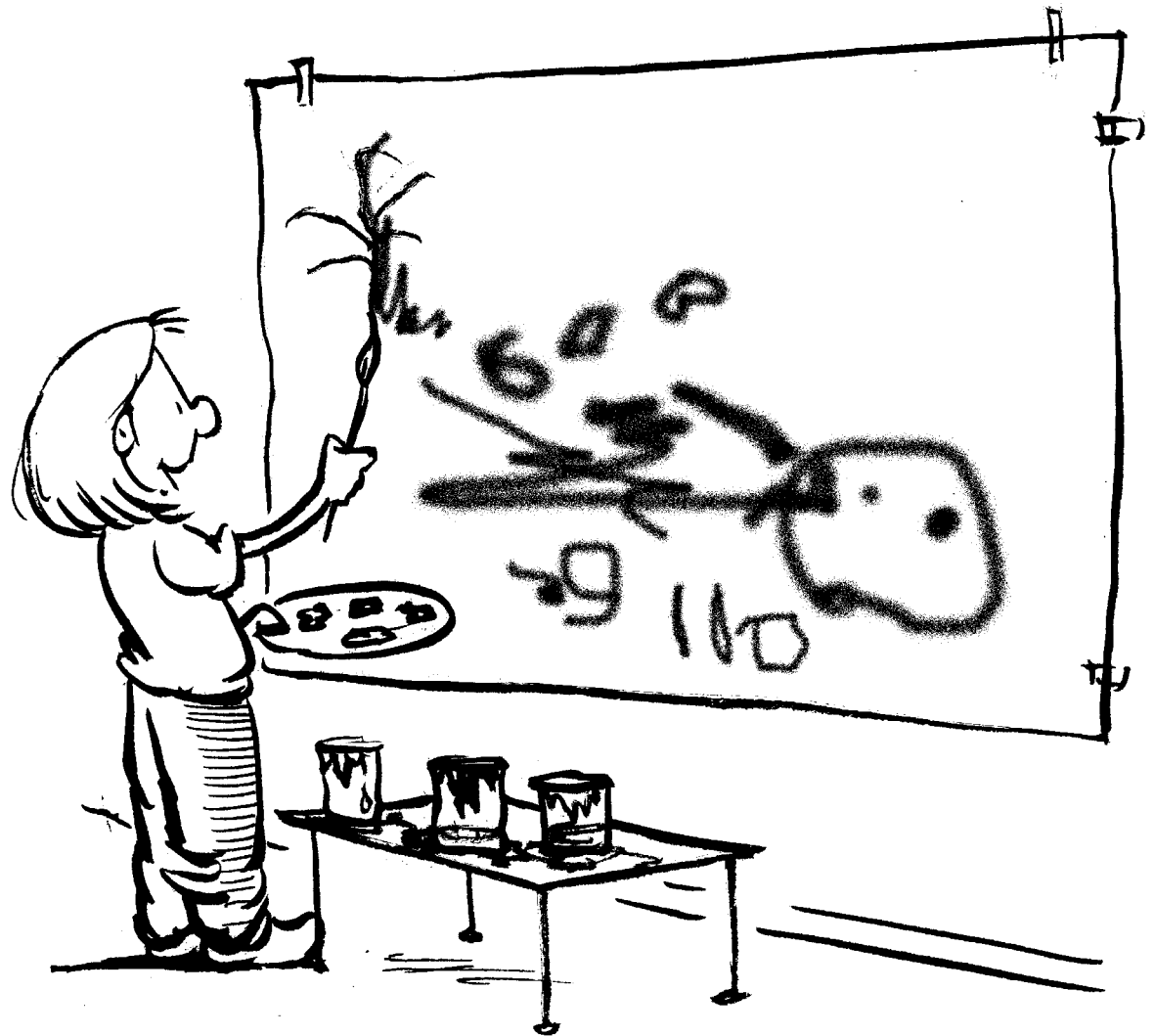
How does dancing to music help promote creative expression?

Because dancing to music is something anyone can be good at, it is a creative activity that isn't judged or subjected to comparison. It can express a variety of feelings, and help children show their understanding and interpret their experiences. It is playful, and can be used to represent stories, moods and ideas.

When you add scarves or musical instruments, (use containers with rice inside as "shakers" or wooden sticks) dancing becomes an activity that uses "tools" of creativity and expands your child's experiences. Your child's imagination is also at work — so dancing can represent both fantasies and real-life experiences.

Children's books that promote creative expression:

- *Roxaboxen* by Alice McLerran
- *Clap Your Hands* by Lorinda Cauley
- *Pretend You're a Cat* by Jean Marzollo
- *Mouse Paint* by Ellen Stoll Walsh
- *Matthew's Dream* by Leo Lionni
- *Max Found Two Sticks* by Brian Pinkney



PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH

All children develop in individual and unique ways. No two children are identical in body size, shape, skills or rate of development. Still, there is a predictable sequence in developing physical skills. For example, before your child learned to run, she sat, crawled and walked. Before she writes her name, she needs to learn to hold a spoon, string beads and use a crayon.

Your child uses her senses to explore her physical environment. While she may not appear interested in nutrition and sensible health habits, from a very early age she is learning and developing attitudes about health, safety, nutrition and physical activity. How does she form these attitudes and habits? From her experiences, and from the messages you and other adults send through your words and actions. You are a powerful force in your child's healthy growth and development.

What you can do

- Help your child learn how to care for her body — wash hands, use a tissue and dispose of it properly to keep sneeze and cough germs from spreading, brush her teeth and wash her body.
- Use routines to reinforce taking care of your child's own body. For instance, build time for a bath and brushing teeth into your evening schedule.
- Encourage healthy eating by offering your child nutritious food choices and a balanced diet. Be a good role model by eating healthy foods yourself, and talking about why certain foods are good to eat.
- Involve children in preparing healthy food.
- Turn off the TV and limit screen time — which includes watching videos or DVDs, playing video games, and using the computer.
- Encourage active play outdoors. Supervise their play, or better yet, join in. Find activities you enjoy as a family — such as swimming, hiking, playing ball, sledding, and riding bikes — and make them part of your family routine.

- Teach your child about safety. Hold hands when crossing the street; require that she wear a bike helmet just as adults do when riding a bike (even a tricycle!); walk, don't run, indoors; and use car seats and seat belts appropriately.

A Family Activity: Playing Ball

Playing ball is an activity families can do together from infancy through adulthood. Babies enjoy rolling balls, while young children learn, practice and master more complex ball skills like throwing, catching, bouncing, kicking and batting. Balls come in a variety of shapes, sizes and weights, and they can be used indoors or outdoors.

Most people recognize that ball play contributes to children's physical development — but it also builds social and emotional skills, and teaches science concepts. Lightweight balls are easier for young children to manipulate than full-size ones.

Remember that play and having fun together is as important as learning ball skills, and that physical activity is a habit you want your child to develop for a lifetime.

How does playing ball help promote physical development?

While playing with balls, your child moves his body in ways that demonstrate control, balance and coordination. Just steadying a ball and then propelling it through space by rolling, throwing, kicking or bouncing requires control and coordination. Ball play also helps children begin to understand that daily activity promotes overall health because it's a great form of exercise. Setting time aside for ball play without calling it "exercise" makes physical activity part of your, and your child's, daily routine.

Ball play develops many important skills that your child may use as she grows older and participates in teams or organized activity. While organized team sports are not usually appropriate for

preschoolers, many early-elementary-age children learn to play soccer, T-ball and other games. If your child becomes interested in such activities, her early experiences and ball skills may ease her way into this type of active play.

Children's books that promote physical development and health:

- *We're Going On a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen
- *Jonathan and His Mommy* by Irene Smalls
- *Oliver's Fruit Garden* by Vivian French
- *Gregory the Terrible Eater* by Mitchell Sharmat
- *Good Enough to Eat*, by Lizzie Rockwell
- *Baby Duck and the Bad Eyeglasses* by Amy Hest
- *The Lion Who Had Asthma* by Jonathan London
- *Eyes, Nose, Fingers and Toes* by Judy Hindley



RESOURCES FOR FAMILY FUN

Here are some recipes for art materials and projects:

Cornstarch Goop

3 cups corn starch

2 cups warm water

Gradually add water to corn starch. Mix ingredients together with your hands. Goop is done when mass goes from lumpy to satiny texture.

Goop hardens in the air and turns to liquid when held. Make fingerprints or hand prints and describe the texture. Does it feel firm and powdery? Try holding a ball of it in the palm of your hand. What does it feel like now? Can you keep it from dripping through your fingers?

This is fun, but it can get messy. It's best to do this in the kitchen or bathroom.

Make a collage

Collect almost any kind of material — pictures from magazines, calendars or cards, yarn, ribbon, tissue paper, recycled gift wrap, scraps of fabric, Styrofoam, leaves, dried flowers ... the list is endless. Use glue or glue sticks to attach the material to paper or cardboard with your child's (or your own) unique design.

Make a theme collage: "People," or "Food," or "Things I like to do in the winter." Or make a three-dimensional structure using scraps of wood, cardboard boxes, pieces of Styrofoam, recycled "beautiful junk." Let your imagination go wild!

"Foolish" Putty

In a large bowl, mix equal amounts of Elmer's glue and liquid starch by hand. Then you can see how it stretches or make copies of the Sunday funnies by pressing it hard against the paper and stretching it.

Biggest Best Bubbles

2 cups of Joy or Dawn dish detergent

6 cups of water

3/4 cup Karo light corn syrup

1 tbsp. glycerin (optional)

The name brands are important to this recipe — other brands of detergent won't work as well. Combine ingredients in a plastic bottle or container with a tight-fitting lid. Shake well. Allow solution to settle for at least four hours before using. Pour solution into a cake pan or any wide flat tray for dipping and blowing.

You'd be amazed at what you can use to blow bubbles. Try funnels, recycled plastic cherry tomato boxes, a coat hanger loop for really big bubbles, pipe cleaners, or your fingers. Anything that can make a loop can be used to blow bubbles. The bubble solution improves with age and can be saved in a container with an air-tight lid.

Note: the area around the bubble pan can get very slippery with spilled solution. Lay lots of large towels under your bubble station to sop up the drips. For more art ideas and recipes, go to www.vermontartscouncil.org/hsap/download_docs.htm.

Add these songs and fingerplays to your family's collection.

Home Sweet Home

A nest is a home for a robin (cup hands to form a nest)
A hive is a home for a bee (turn cupped hands over)
A hole is a home for a rabbit (make hole with hands)
And a house is a house for me (make roof with peaked hands)

Quiet Cats

We are little pussy cats (use hands, crawl, or tip-toe)
Walking round and round
We have cushions on our feet (whisper)
And never make a sound

Taller, Smaller

When I stretch up, I feel so tall
When I bend down, I feel so small
Taller, taller, taller, taller
Smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller
Into a tiny ball

The Apple Tree

Way up high in the apple tree (point up high)
Two little apples smile at me (make two circles with hands)
I shook that tree as hard as I could (wrap hands around "trunk" and shake)
Down came the apples and (two circle hands come down)
Mmmm, they were good! (rub tummy)

The Itsy Bitsy Spider

The itsy, bitsy spider went up the water spout
Down came the rain and washed the spider out
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain
And the itsy, bitsy spider went up the spout again

Variations:

Use a great, big voice to sing about the "great, big spider" or a small, squeaky voice to sing about the "eensy, weensy spider"

Apples and Bananas

I like to eat, eat, eat apples and bananas
I like to eat, eat, eat apples and bananas
I like to ate, ate, ate ay-ples and ba-nay-nays
I like to ate, ate, ate ay-ples and ba-nay-nays
I like to eat, eat, eat ee-ples and bee-nee-nees
I like to eat, eat, eat ee-ples and bee-nee-nees
I like to ite, ite, ite i-ples and by-ny-nys
I like to ite, ite, ite i-ples and by-ny-nys
I like to ote, ote, ote oh-ples and bo-no-nos
I like to ote, ote, ote oh-ples and bo-no-nos
I like to oot, oot, oot oo-ples and boo-noo-noos
I like to oot, oot, oot oo-ples and boo-noo-noos

You Are My Sunshine

You are my sunshine,
My only sunshine.
You make me happy
When skies are grey.
You never know, dear
How much I love you.
Please don't take
My sunshine away.

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream.



THE VERMONT EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

I. Approaches to Learning

1. **Play** Children engage in play as a means to develop their individual approach to learning.
2. **Curiosity** Children demonstrate curiosity and a willingness to participate in tasks and challenges.
3. **Persistence** Children demonstrate an increased ability to show initiative, accept help, take risks, and work towards completing tasks.
4. **Self-organization** Children demonstrate an increased ability to establish goals, develop and follow through with plans.
5. **Reasoning** Children demonstrate an increased ability to identify, evaluate and provide possible solutions to problems.
6. **Application** Children use their prior experiences, senses, and knowledge to learn in new ways.

II. Social and Emotional Development

1. **Play** Children use play as a vehicle to build relationships and to develop an appreciation for their own abilities and accomplishments.
2. **Self Concept** Children demonstrate and express a positive awareness of self and an awareness of limitations.
3. **Self Control** Children increase their capacity for self-control and to deal with frustrations, and increase their awareness of limitations.
4. **Interactions with Others** Children develop successful relationships with other members of their learning community.
5. **Sense of Community** Children increasingly demonstrate a sense of belonging to the classroom/program, family and community.

III. Language, Literacy & Communication

1. **Play** Children engage in play as a means to develop their receptive and expressive language skills.

Children engage in play as a means to develop early reading and writing skills.

2. **Listening and Understanding** Children develop skills in listening and in understanding language.
3. **Speaking and Communicating** Children will use verbal and non-verbal language to express and to communicate information.
4. **Vocabulary** Children will acquire and use new words to increase their understanding and express ideas.
5. **Early Writing** Children demonstrate an interest and ability in using symbols to represent words and ideas.
6. **Early Reading** Children demonstrate an interest in:

Phonemic and Phonological Awareness – Learning letters and the combination of letter sounds with letter symbols

Book Knowledge and Appreciation – Understanding and appreciating that books and other forms of print have a purpose.

Print Awareness and Concepts – Recognizing the association between spoken and written words by following print as it is read aloud.

Alphabet Knowledge – Recognizing that symbols are associated with letters of the alphabet and that they form words.



IV. Mathematics

1. **Play** Children engage in play to develop and add to their mathematical thinking and problem solving.
2. **Numbers and Operations** Children show interest and curiosity in counting and grouping objects and numbers.
3. **Geometry and Spatial Sense** Children show an interest in recognizing and creating shapes and an awareness of position in space.
4. **Patterns and Measurement** Children show an interest in recognizing and creating patterns, comparing, and measuring time and quantity.

V. Science

1. **Play** Children engage in play as a means to develop their scientific skills.
2. **Scientific Knowledge** Children learn about the development of the natural and physical worlds.
3. **Scientific Skills and Methods** Children begin to use scientific tools and methods to learn about their world.

VI. Social Studies

1. **Play** Children engage in play as a means to develop an understanding of social studies.
2. **Spaces and Geography** Children will demonstrate an understanding of and appreciation for their physical environment.
3. **People and How They Live** Children shall demonstrate skills related to understanding, communication, sharing, cooperation, and participation with others in a community.

4. **People and Their Environment** Children demonstrate an awareness of and appreciation for the environment.

5. **People and the Past** Children demonstrate an understanding of past events and their connection to the present and future.

VII. Creative Expression

1. **Play** Children engage in play as a means of self expression and creativity.
2. **Creative Expression** Children engage in individual or group activities that represent real-life experiences, ideas, knowledge, feelings and fantasy.
3. **Tools** Children use a variety of tools and art media to creatively express their ideas.
4. **Appreciation of the Arts** Children express interest in and begin to build a knowledge base in the arts.

VIII. Physical Health and Development

1. **Play** Children engage in play as a means to understand healthy behavior and develop their physical bodies.
2. **Gross Motor/Large Muscle** Children increasingly move their bodies in ways that demonstrate control, balance, and coordination.
3. **Fine Motor/Small Muscle** Children use their fingers and hands in ways that develop hand-eye coordination, strength, control, and object manipulation.
4. **Senses** Children increase their understanding of the use of their eyes, ears, fingers, nose, and mouth, and how the senses work together.
5. **Healthy Habits** Children begin to understand how daily activity and healthy behavior promote overall personal health and safety.

To view the complete version of the Vermont Early Learning Standards, go to www.state.vt.us/educ/new/pdfdoc/pgm_earlyed/vels_03.pdf



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